

COMMENTARY: Miyazaki's new animated film and its antiwar pacifism: *The Wind Rises (Kaze Tachinu)*

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Abstract

The latest Ghibli animation film, 'The Wind Rises' (*Kaze Tachinu*) released on 20 July 2013, illustrates a 'difficult time to live' during which the Japanese people suffered from the Great Kanto earthquake that killed 10,000 people, worldwide economic depression that resulted in high unemployment rates, and the following Second World War. Miyazaki stated that the film does not attempt to 'denounce' war or to beautify the Japanese Zero Fighter plane, but to portray a Japanese young man who chased his dream and cherished his love despite the difficult age he lived in. Although Miyazaki might have intended to make an apolitical animation, his viewpoint on Japan's involvement in the Pacific War is that "it was wrong from the beginning" but also "useless to blame Jiro for it". However, Japan's 'war responsibility' as an important historical lesson should not be forgotten. 'The Wind Rises' has a clear message for the Japanese constitutional revision debate, especially the revision of Article 9.

Keywords: Antiwar pacifism, Film review, Miyazaki animation, War responsibility.

This is a review² of the Japanese animation film directed by Hayao Miyazaki from Studio Ghibli, released in 2013, in 126 minutes. It has been about two years since the release of the previous animation film by Studio Ghibli, 'From the Red Poppy Hill' (*Kokuriko zaka kara*) which nostalgically depicted the "good old days of Japan" (Askew, 2013). By contrast, the latest Ghibli animation film, 'The Wind Rises' (*Kaze Tachinu*) released on 20 July 2013, illustrates a "difficult time to live" (*ikiru noni tsurai jidai*) during which the Japanese people suffered from the Great Kanto earthquake that killed 10,000 people, worldwide economic depression that resulted in high unemployment rates, and the following Second World War (Miyazaki, 2011a). As Miyazaki himself noted, however, this film does not attempt to 'denounce' (*kyudansuru*) war or to beautify the Japanese Zero Fighter plane, but to portray a Japanese young man who chased his dream and cherished his love despite the difficult age he lived in (Miyazaki, 2011b).

The film is based on a romantic fiction, 'The Wind Rises' (*Kaze Tachinu*) (1938), written by Tatsuo Hori (Hori, 2013) as well as on the real life of Jiro Horikoshi (1903-1982) who designed Japan's Mitsubishi A6M Zero Fighter. Miyazaki produced an animated cartoon based on the story, which was serialized in Model Graphix from April 2009 to January 2010 (Mainichi Shimbun, 13 December 2012). The animation is basically about a love story between Jiro Horikoshi, who chases his dream of creating an aircraft, and Naoko Satomi, a beautiful young lady who loves painting and suffers from tuberculosis, an incurable disease at that time.

Some movies convey narratives and "aspects of Japan's wartime and pre-war history" (Iles, 2008), and the film 'The Wind Rises' can be categorized as one of the storytellers of war. To 'memorize war' (*senso o kiokusuru*) could be fictionalized; and this memory might be different from nation to nation, and people to people (Fujiwara, 2001: 53-56). From a Korean perspective, for example, the film can be regarded as a nationalistic 'right wing movie' (*uyoku eiga*) which beautifies the age of Imperial Japan (J-cast, 2013). Either way, however, the intention of this film is to make audience remember the Pacific War.

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² This review is one of the pilot studies related to my research on "War and Peace in Japanese Animation: Miyazaki Anime's Message for Peaceful Coexistence" to be presented at the 2013 Asia-Pacific Peace Research Association.

Although Miyazaki explained that the film does not intend to criticize war, the descriptions of his antiwar pacifism can be seen, albeit casually, in the work. From the outset of its official trailer, the first sentence of the caption narrates: “There was a war in Japan (*katsute, nihonde senso ga atta*)”. It also emphasizes that: “Then, Japan plunged into war (*soshite, nihon wa senso e totsunyu shiteitta*)” (Youtube.com 2013). Although Miyazaki might have intended to make an apolitical animation, his viewpoint on Japan’s involvement in the Pacific War is clear. Miyazaki stated that “it was wrong from the beginning to go to war” and that “But it’s useless... to blame Jiro for it” (The Economist, 2013).

Likewise, Jiro, as the main character, simply loves to design a beautiful airplane rather than create a military aircraft. To be more precise, after he designed the military aircraft and then tried to lighten the weight, he jokingly said that it would be better if the plane was not equipped with machine guns. More explicitly, Castorp, a mysterious German personage who stays at the same accommodation with Jiro and Naoko, tells Jiro that Japan forgets the memory of war such as the Manchurian incident (1931) and Japan’s secession from the League of Nations (1933). Castorp warns that Japan would ‘rupture’ (*haretsusuru*) if the country forgets its ‘war responsibility’ as an important historical lesson. Clearly, Miyazaki made Castorp emphasize the significance of the war memory so that Japan does not repeat the same mistake. It can be argued that this scene with some memorable lines by Castorp symbolizes Miyazaki’s antiwar pacifism.

Furthermore, Jiro prefers fish rather than meat despite his friend’s suggestion to eat more meat. In Japanese culture, this also indicates that Jiro’s characteristic is not a masculine or militaristic type. Although Caproni, an Italian master of airplane design, contributes to the creation of military aircrafts like Jiro, Caproni encourages Jiro to do his best to make his ‘dreams’ come true. Interestingly, besides the striking lines regarding Japan’s war responsibility, it was somehow emphasized that Castorp’s favorite food is watercress implying that he might be a vegetarian. It can be argued that the characteristics of these figures symbolize the antiwar stance of Miyazaki animation.

Indeed, as Toshio Suzuki, the producer at Studio Ghibli, commented, in spite of Miyazaki’s preference for military airplanes, this film contains an “antiwar message” just like other Studio Ghibli works, such as ‘Porco Rosso’ (*Kurenai no Buta*) (1992) and ‘Hawl’s Moving Castle’ (*Hauru no Ugokushiro*) (2004) (Tokyo Shimbun, 9 May 2013). Indeed, the main character of ‘Porco Rosso’ consistently shows his “non-killing” philosophy even in the battle scenes. Suzuki, moreover, argues that there exists no “combat scenes” of war in *Kaze Tachinu* (Ibid). Although Jiro as a kid in the beginning of the film was involved in fighting (*kenka*), right after the fighting, Jiro’s mother told him not to fight and the parenting might have influenced Jiro’s way of thinking regarding fighting. In this sense, although animated violence can be seen in the film, it has some educational implication for ‘non-fighting’.

Based on the antiwar philosophy, ‘The Wind Rises’ has a clear message for the Japanese constitutional revision debate, especially the revision of Article 9 (peace clause). When discussing Ghibli’s animation, Producer Suzuki explicitly opposed constitutional revision and argued that Japan should appeal to the world based on Article 9 of its ‘Pacifist Constitution’ (Ibid). Likewise, on 19 July 2013, the day before the release of *The Wind Rises*, Director Miyazaki, expressed a strong message which argued over Japan’s ‘war responsibility’, saying “constitutional revision is out of question” (Tokyo Shimbun, 19 July 2013). Thus, Miyazaki’s new animated film symbolizes his anti-war pacifism. There is no doubt that ‘The Wind Rises’ contains a “memory of war” as a “message for peace” in relation to Japan’s ‘war responsibility’ over the Second World War. Furthermore, Miyazaki argues that Japan should not start a conflict with other Asian

countries by revising its peace clause (Tokyo Shimbun, 27 July 2013). The repeated opposition to constitutional revision by Suzuki and Miyazaki represent that Ghibli movies including 'The Wind Rises' value the importance of peaceful coexistence between Japan and other countries in the Asia Pacific and the World.

In sum, alongside Miyazaki's antiwar pacifism, this film conveys the following philosophical message: Despite the difficult times, "we must try to live" (*ikineba*), pursuing our dreams and cherishing love.

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